

Clergywoman gave workshop at World Religions parliament

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One hundred years ago in September 1893, a unique gathering was held in Chicago, Illinois. As part of the Chicago World's Fair, the Parliament of the World's Religions brought together men and women from 41 of the world's different religions and denominations.

It was the first public meeting of representatives of the world's major religions. It was the birth of interfaith dialogue in the modern world.

It also was a beautiful vision for those representatives: peace, understanding, progress. But religious intolerance and hatred continue today. It was an appropriate time, 100 years later, to convene the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions. From Aug. 28 through Sept. 4, such critical issues as non-violence and peace; the Earth; social and economic justice; the human community; science and technology; power, politics, and liberation; and the next generation were discussed.

The Parliament was not without Presbyterian influence. The president of Presbyterian McCormick Theological Seminary, which is located in Chicago, is chairman of the Board of the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from its Louisville, KY, headquarters, is a contributor, as is the Presbytery of Chicago.

Overall, there were about 160 co-sponsors, ranging from the American Buddhist Congress to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Boston Presbytery had an influence at the Parliament, too: the Rev. Eileen Epperson presented a workshop.

Epperson's workshop, which was given on Sept. 1, was entitled, "Envisioning a World without Religious Violence." The workshop explored what it is like to live in the midst of, and be the target of, religious violence. It considered how the lives of all are affected by religious bigotry against a few. Then the workshop examined what it might be like to live in an environment that was truly safe for religion.

On Nov. 20 Epperson presented this workshop again at a one-day event in North Conway, NH, entitled "Celebrating Interfaith Dialogue." She also gave the keynote address there as follow-up to the Parliament in Chicago. She has developed two other workshops, "Standing for Religious Harmony" and "Living in the Joy of Religious Celebration," that she plans to offer in the Boston area.

She has founded and is executive director of the Religious Freedom Project, an organization dedicated to ending religious violence on the planet by 2005. For more information, contact her at 23-8 Royal Crest Drive, Marlborough, MA 01752 or 508-624-7284.